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SUBJECT: IMPROVING IRAQI BORDER SECURITY: A WORK IN PROGRESS

Classified By: Pol-Mil Minister-Counselor Marcie B. Ries, Reasons 1.4(b)  
) and (d)

1. (S) SUMMARY: Border security continues to be a focus of both GOI and Coalition attention as the security situation improves and Iraq takes increasing responsibility for its own affairs. Al Qaeda in Iraq's reliance on transnational networks is increasing as its operating space and popularity in Iraq have been degraded. JAM Special Groups are now regrouping and being trained in Iran and will continue to depend on illegal, usually night-time, border crossings to operate and receive weapons. The Iraqi Directorate of Border Enforcement (DBE), under the leadership of LTG Muhsen and assisted by the Coalition, has responded to these challenges by prioritizing improvements in the infrastructure and equipment on the Iranian and Syrian borders. These investments have already paid dividends through a number of arrests of suspected terrorists and facilitators entering from Syria. Coalition Forces are now making security on the Iranian border their top border priority and 2008 will see an expanded presence through a defense in depth in partnership with Iraqi Security Forces. Challenges remaining include uneven cooperation with neighboring governments, coordination between the GOI and KRG, and corruption within the DBE. END SUMMARY.

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BORDERS: KEY TO THE FIGHT AGAINST AQI AND JAM/SPECIAL GROUPS  
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2. (S/NF) Both of the top two security threats in Iraq, Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) and Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) Special Groups, depend on the ability to bring resources into Iraq for their success. AQI has long used Iraq's lengthy border with Syria as a transit point for the foreign terrorist recruits it receives from across the region. Over the last year, Coalition and Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) have eliminated or disrupted many of AQI's safe havens inside Iraq with significant help from Sunni tribes and volunteers. As a result, AQI will likely continue accepting foreign fighters to staff its leadership ranks and cadre of suicide bombers even as ISF and Coalition forces step up the disruption process. Though foreign terrorists comprise only some 10 percent of AQI's fighters, the operational impact far outweighs their numbers: foreign terrorists conduct approximately 90% of all suicide attacks. (NOTE: Estimates of AQI's size are difficult to assess. MNF-I estimates the number to be between 1600 to 2600 fighters.) Politically, foreign terrorists also represent a tangible link to al-Qaeda's global struggle and those experienced terrorists who leave Iraq pose a danger to U.S. allies throughout the region and beyond. Multi-National Force-Iraq (MNF-I) estimates that on average 14-17 foreign terrorists are crossing into Iraq from Syria each month. The flow may have

been suspended entirely in recent weeks due to increased CF and ISF operations in Ninewah as part of the overall effort against AQI in Mosul. The Abu Ghadiyah Network is assessed to be the principal conduit for foreign terrorists heading into Iraq to join AQI. This network continues to operate with the knowledge of the Syrian government and sends virtually all of its foreign terrorists into Iraq across the Syrian border.

13. (S/NF) JAM Special Groups depend on weapons smuggled across the border from Iran to provide them with their most dangerous tools: rockets, mortars, explosively-formed projectiles (EFPs), and a variety of other arms and explosives. Caches discovered in Basrah and Baghdad have revealed Iranian munitions manufactured as recently as March 2008. Despite significant efforts, neither the Coalition nor the ISF have ever interdicted a shipment of Iranian weapons as it was entering Iraq, making a thorough analysis of the weapons traffic impossible. JAM Special Groups also transit across the border with Iran in order to seek refuge from CF and ISF, to meet IRGC Quds Force contacts, and to receive weapons and organizational training in Quds Force-sponsored camps. The succession of operations in Basrah, Sadr City, and al Amarah in the last three months has resulted in an unprecedented flow of Special Groups personnel over the border to Iran with smaller numbers seeking refuge in Syria. While some were detained before managing to cross into Iran, ISF and CF efforts to interdict key Special Groups members while fleeing were largely unsuccessful: Special Groups members have taken advantage of both smuggling "rat-lines" to cross illegally into Iran and of corrupt or inept DBE

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personnel to cross at legal Points of Entry (POEs) without being caught, sometimes using passports procured for this purpose.

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DBE LEADERSHIP STEPPING UP  
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14. (C) LTG Muhsen, the chief of the Directorate of Border Enforcement (DBE), is a leader respected both by his Coalition interlocutors and the Prime Minister, as evidenced by his recent promotion from Major General to Lieutenant General. He has traveled to meet his counterparts from most of Iraq's neighbors, including Iran and Syria, and he was a member of the Iraqi delegation to the last round of trilateral talks with the U.S. and Iran in August 2007. Muhsen was also a member of the "tiger team" of senior Iraqi leaders who accompanied the Prime Minister during the initial phase of operations in Basrah and Mosul. He has demonstrated a strong commitment to holding his subordinates responsible for their performance, sacking commanders and POE directors at the Iranian and Syrian border who were corrupt or inept.

15. (C) With advice from his Coalition partners (including Embassy's DHS Attach and the Multi-National Corps- Iraq (MNC-I) DBE Transition Team embedded in his headquarters) he has been one of the most forward-looking administrators within the Ministry of the Interior (MOI). For example, he has prepared the most detailed budget plan within the ministry, and has requested multi-year rather than annual budgeting. Muhsen, with Coalition support, succeeded in arguing for an increase in DBE's budget from \$273 million in 2007 to \$401 million in 2008. In addition, the MOI 2008 supplemental budget request (not yet approved) includes \$216 million for the DBE to pay for the first year of a three-year capital improvement plan. New and improved border forts, observation towers, roads, wells, fuel storage, maintenance facilities, and headquarters buildings are included. The improvements will be built predominately along the border with Iran in Basrah, Maysan, and Wasit as well as along the Syrian border. Coalition cost-sharing of \$25.35 million will add further infrastructure improvements to the GOI's investment. In order to build such a large number of

facilities as quickly as possible, LTG Muhsen has taken a step made by few of his peers in the GOI: he has delegated authority and responsibility for completing projects to his brigade commanders and gave them the money to complete the projects in their areas. This carries risks, namely corruption, but it is likely the only way to get such a large number of projects completed in a timely fashion, especially given the limited capacity of the DBE headquarters to oversee projects spread from one end of Iraq to the other. On the personnel front, the DBE is projected to increase to an end-strength of 46,000 by the end of 2008 from 40,000 in 2007.

16. (C) Draft MOI framework legislation currently being considered by the Council of Representatives would elevate the DBE director, currently under the Deputy Minister for Support Forces, to Deputy Minister level. A less welcome section of the legislation would create an ill-defined and seemingly duplicative General Commission for Borders which would have subordinate Directors General to control Land, Air, and Sea POEs. Separating control of the POEs from the rest of the border forces would increase the likelihood of bureaucratic turf battles and seams in security on the borders. Post will monitor the progress of this legislation which has only just been introduced.

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IRANIAN BORDER NOW THE TOP PRIORITY  
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17. (S) As part of the comprehensive Embassy/MNF-I strategy to counter malign Iranian influence, MNF-I has made the Iranian border its top border security priority, displacing efforts on the Syrian border to second. This will not degrade efforts on the Syrian border as investments in improving POEs there will continue and Border Transition Teams (BTTs) and POE Transition Teams (POETTs) stationed there will remain. The border with Iran will be made more secure through a multi-pronged effort. The POEs at Zurbatiyah and al-Sheeb (along the Iranian border) will be enhanced with better infrastructure and equipment, similar to improvements already made to al Qaim on the Syrian border. The Coalition will provide a presence at the POEs through POETTs stationed at

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Zurbatiyah, al-Sheeb, and Shalamcha. CF and ISF will be deployed in depth, dozens of kilometers behind the border along suspected trafficking routes in Maysan and Basrah provinces. The Coalition will construct combat outposts at al-Sheeb and Shalamcha POEs to serve as platforms for interdiction and surveillance in the surrounding border area, one known for smuggling activity due to its marshy terrain.

18. (C) Smuggling has been a traditional activity for certain residents on both sides of the border in Southeast Iraq and Southwest Iran, a state of affairs unlikely to change in the near term despite our efforts. Coalition and GOI efforts can, however, increase the difficulty and time required to move weapons and terrorists across the border from Iran.

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MAINTAINING VIGILANCE ON THE SYRIAN BORDER  
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19. (C) Over the last year, the Coalition presence on the Iraq-Syria border has been significantly expanded. The two brigades of DBE forces on this border have BTTs embedded in their headquarters and in each of their combined eight battalions. POETTs also provide advice, on-the-job training, and technical assistance at the Rabiya, Waleed, and Al Qaim-Husaybah POEs on the Syrian border. Al Qaim-Husaybah was the first POE to be completely refurbished as an "Enhanced POE" incorporating the latest technology and a modernized physical infrastructure and it will serve as a template for improvements at other POEs. The BTTs and POETTs are composed of contractor and DHS personnel augmented by Coalition military personnel in some cases. This presence

helps to ensure that DBE personnel follow proper procedures, reduces corruption, and assists in the maintenance and operation of sophisticated equipment such as biometric and x-ray devices used to screen travelers and cargo.

¶10. (S) This equipment and oversight has paid off in the form of nearly 20 arrests of suspected terrorists and facilitators in the last six months, most of whom were detained due to hits in PISCES (Personal Identification Secure Comparison Evaluation System) or biometric databases. In a recent case, on June 17 a PISCES hit on the name of a traveler entering the Waleed POE from Syria resulted in the arrest of a suspected terrorist. A fingerprint left on an IED/weapons cache by Saad Shalish Adai al-Seedy caused his name to be flagged and resulted in his arrest by ISF. Besides those detained, sensitive reporting indicates that some terrorists are deterred from traveling into Iraq through POEs due to the fear of being caught. Crossing illegally is possible, but takes longer and brings the possibility of criminal prosecution for illegal entry if caught and a potentially lengthy prison sentence (15 years, even in the absence of other charges, is not uncommon).

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SECURITY OF AIR AND SEA PORTS  
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¶11. (C) Responsibility for securing air and sea ports has been a matter of contention within the GOI. Currently, the Ministry of Transportation (MOT) has this responsibility, which has been problematic due to the poor performance of the Acting Minister, Shirwan al-Waeli. While al-Waeli retains his position as Minister of State for National Security Affairs, he resigned as Acting MOT on April 11 following Operation Charge of the Knights, possibly due to a drop in his stock in the eyes of the Prime Minister. At roughly the same time, the Council of Ministers approved a proposal to move responsibility for security of airports and sea ports from MOT to MOI. Recently, the Prime Minister appointed a cross ministerial Border and Ports Committee. The Committee includes Ministry of Transportation, Ministry Of Trade, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Health and Ministry of Finance Deputy Ministers. The Committee agreed on May 22 that land border security is Interior's; while responsibility, due to technical international standards and requirements, for maritime ports and airports should remain in Transportation.

¶12. (C) Umm Qasr is Iraq's most important port, but until recently it was assessed to be thoroughly infiltrated by criminal gangs associated with JAM. Extortion by these criminals drove away legitimate traffic and provided financial support for terrorism. As part of Operation Charge

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of the Knights, the clearing of Basrah of criminal elements, the Iraqi Army drove the criminal gangs out of Umm Qasr. The Iraqi Navy assumed responsibility and on April 15, established security at the port and village with several companies of Iraqi Marines. Taking advantage of the new environment, a U.S. Coast Guard team completed an assessment of the port on June 5 which will help guide the GOI in making changes needed to bring Umm Qasr up to International Ships and Port Security (ISPS) standards. Embassy and MNF-I are advocating that the GOI contract the operation of Umm Qasr to an international company with expertise in port management. This company could then use private contracted security to control the port, a model currently being used successfully at Baghdad International Airport.

¶13. (C) Basrah Airport, serving Iraq's second-largest city, is another potential economic engine which has not achieved its potential. DBE personnel have now assumed responsibility for immigration and security functions, and the airport currently serves several hundred passengers per day. However, current DBE-provided airport security does not meet

international standards. Embassy and MNF-I are also advocating that the GOI contract with an international firm to provide airport security in accordance with International Civil Aviation Organization standards.

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SERIOUS CHALLENGES REMAIN  
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¶14. (S/NF) Coordination between the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and the GOI on border security and immigration and customs is especially weak. While the DBE personnel in the KRG are nominally under the control of the DBE, they are in practice more responsive to KRG authorities.

¶15. (C) Corruption within the DBE has been a long-running problem predating the current government. LTG Muhsen is not known or perceived to be corrupt and has not tolerated misdeeds when they have come to light. The scope of the problem, however, will likely not lend itself to a quick solution. Several POE directors have been fired by LTG Muhsen for corruption. It is unknown to what degree corruption within the DBE might be used to facilitate the entry of weapons and foreign terrorists, but post and MNF-I will watch this threat closely.

¶16. (S) Cooperation with Iraq's neighbors on border security is uneven. Embassy and MNF-I have encouraged the GOI to take advantage of the Border Security Working Group of the Neighbors Process to reach agreement on small tangible improvements, but little has been achieved to date. The dearth of trust between the GOI and its neighbors and among the neighbors themselves makes for a challenging environment. An apparent lack of GOI commitment or capacity to use this multilateral process has exacerbated the inertia. Post sees more potential in bilateral cooperation efforts, in particular with Turkey, which is motivated to work with the GOI in order to combat the PKK, as well as improve commercial ties in what is still an essentially open field. In this vein, the reopening of the neighboring countries, diplomatic missions, many of which are expected to occur over the coming months, will facilitate direct communications and provide a forum to work out bilateral irritants that have stymied efforts to improve border security measures.

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